

Central California Resource Advisory Council
Meeting Notes
May 18-19, 2012
Bridgeport, CA

May 18

Attendees

RAC: Steve Koretoff, George Armstrong, Blair Knox, Walt Pachucki, Mary Gorden, Paul McFarland, Sally Miller, Reb Monaco, Carl Twisselman, Roger Mitchell.

BLM: Este Stifel, CenCal District manager; David Christy, CenCal public affairs officer; Sky Murphy, Hollister Field Office planner; Bill Haigh, Mother Lode Field Office manager; Tim Smith, Bakersfield Field Office manager; Bernadette Lovato, Bishop Field Office manager.

Public: Drew Foster, Sam Davidson, Gary Nelson, Jim Gorden, Chris Lizze, Malcolm Clark, Zane and Carolyn Davis, Maurica Anderson, Marcia Schmitz, Bill Crum, L.I. Willimenn, Deborah Lurie, Barbara Christy, Jill Monaco, Martha Twisselman.

Election of Officers

Steve Koretoff was elected RAC chair and Roger Mitchell was elected vice chair.

State Report

BLM Director Bob Abbey will retire at the end of May. Mike Pool will be acting director. Jim Kenna started as the new California state director in September 2011, replacing Jim Abbott, who retired. Angie Lara is the new associate state director. Doran Sanchez is the new deputy state director for external affairs, replacing Jan Bedrosian, who retired. Este Stifel is the Cencal District manager, replacing Kathy Hardy, who is the new Eldorado National Forest supervisor.

- **Leadership Team in Washington/State Office:** We received word earlier this week that BLM Director Bob Abbey is retiring as of May 31, 2012. Associated Director Mike Pool will be Acting Director beginning June 1. Marcilynne Burke is Acting Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals Management.
- **Congressional/Legislation:**
Just seven months remaining in the 112th Congress. Focus still remains on jobs and the economy. It's going to be a busy spring and summer for the California delegation as they prepare for election season. We expect changes as a result of the CA redistricting and open primaries. If the new redistricting maps holdup to the challenges, one of the open seats will be the new congressional district (CA-08) that will include more than 8.3 million acres of BLM public lands.

There are about a half dozen legislative proposals that we are tracking. A few that might be of interest to the RAC include:

- **Bridgeport Indian Colony Land Trust Act** sponsored by Rep. McKeon to transfer BLM lands to BIA to hold in trust for the Tribe – the Department testified in support of this bill which made it out of the House committee and now available for vote by the full House.
 - **Gold Hill-Wakamatsu Preservation Act** sponsored by Senator Boxer to acquire and preserve the historical site in Coloma – the Department has testified in support.
 - There are two bills (HR 869 and 2578) sponsored by Rep. Denham that would allow for the inundation and de-designation of the Merced Wild and Scenic River – the Department does not support these bills.
- **Hill Visits Recap** - The State Director recently completed his annual trip to Washington to brief congressionals. Jim met with 13 members/staffs of the California delegation including Senators Feinstein and Boxer and Representatives McClintock (CA-4), McKeon (CA-25), Farr (CA-17) and Capps (CA-23). Jim emphasized BLM-CA priority issues (new energy frontier, economic benefits to communities and America's Great Outdoors. He also discussed BLM-CA emphasis on sustainability, heritage and community. Overall he received positive feedback about BLM-CA and the good work by field offices and many partners.
 - **BLM Priorities:** Our priorities continue to be renewable energy and America's Great Outdoors, including the National Landscape Conservation System, youth initiatives and recreation. Sustainability, Heritage, Community.
 - **Promoting Economic Growth** BLM-California is an engine of economic activity and raises more revenue each year for American taxpayers than it spends. Special areas bring tourism dollars to local communities, and royalties for use of public lands amount to millions of dollars each year.
 - BLM-California brings in \$117 million in oil and gas royalties, \$1.8 million from wind projects, and \$8.6 million from geothermal projects statewide each year
 - Approved solar projects will contribute nearly \$23 million in annual rent and royalties, once built out

Roger Mitchell asked about a state recreation area on the North Fork American River that was going to be transferred to BLM. Bill Haigh said there had been discussion earlier that management of the Auburn State Recreation Area might go to BLM. Since then, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and California State Parks have executed a 20-year agreement for State Parks to manage the area.

RAC Future

Este Stifel said the travel budget is tight and will remain so. She asked the RAC what they see as alternatives to the two in-person meetings held in previous years.

Carl Twisselman said there should be at least an annual meeting and the field trips are an important part of the learning process.

Reb Monaco agreed the field trips are important and suggested RAC members could meet in local offices for a business meeting.

Mary Gorden said the RAC originally met quarterly, with additional work outside the meetings.

Walt Pachucki said the purpose of the RAC needs to be questioned if all it does is meet once a year. He suggested there should be an orientation for new members.

Paul McFarland said unless there are about three meetings a year it's hard for the RAC to know how to work. Individual members might take on specific issues. He also serves on a Federal Regulatory RAC and sees similar issues there. If the RAC gets involved in an issue early in the process it can save BLM money. There should be an annual meeting and field trip. RAC members need to figure out how they can engage the Field Offices and vice versa. He doesn't want the RAC to just be window dressing for a process.

Sally Miller served on the Mono County Planning Commission and likes the idea of the orientation. She is aware of the financial constraints, but RAC members need to get to know each other and see things on the ground. Videoconferencing might be a way to maintain communication.

Roger Mitchell said hot topics where RAC input would be useful come up between meetings and a way needs to be found for the RAC to provide timely input.

Carl Twisselman said it has been valuable for him to interact with the different people on the RAC and he would like to keep doing that. The main functions of the RAC are to advise BLM and act as a liaison to the public.

Blair Knox said the RAC schedule should be driven by issues.

Jim Gorden said boards he is on use videoconferencing. If BLM does that there will need to be public access.

Walt Pachucki said local RAC members could track local issues and send ones that would be appropriate to the full RAC. The RAC started as an issue-driven organization (grazing standards and guidelines) with clear deadlines. In his experience, RAC members from diverse backgrounds develop trust as they work together. They bring additional involvement from outside groups to the RAC.

Steve Koretoff summarized the discussion to that point:

- Face to face meetings are important so members get to know each other and find common ground.
- Field trips are important to see issues on the ground.
- Video conferencing should be explored as a potential communications tool.

- There needs to be a way to address issues that come up after the meeting.
- There needs to be regular communication by the BLM and RAC.
- There should be more work by subgroups or local RAC members.

He would like to see monthly updates on potential and existing issues, one annual meeting and field trip and one business meeting.

Walt Pachucki said BLM could update the RAC after State Leadership Team meetings. A RAC member might attend part of the SLT.

ACTION: BLM will send RAC members orientation material and hold an orientation at the next meeting.

Alabama Hills

Bernadette Lovato said legislation to include the Alabama Hills in the National Landscape Conservation System has been provided by the Lone Pine community group to Senator Feinstein. The proposal has been endorsed by the community and the Inyo County Board of Supervisors, with some nuances.

An Alabama Hills Day was held in early April.

Sally Miller said there would be a fly-in to Washington in late June and they invited Kevin Mazzu.

Paul McFarland said an Alabama Hills group is seeking non-profit status. The Sierra Business Council presented the Alabama Hills group with the Sierra Vision Award in 2011.

OHV Subgroup

Steve Koretoff asked for suggestions from managers on potential OHV areas. Time Smith said the Bakersfield RMP being prepared includes an OHV area on the east side of the Temblors. He would like the RAC and OHV Subgroup to be involved.

Walt Pachucki said he had agreed to mentor Sally Miller as a new RAC member and suggested that might work for others.

ACTION: BLM will provide RAC members with contact information for the other members.

Bishop Field Office Report

BLM Bishop has not heard from Cougar Gold since the firm did some exploration in 2009 in the Bodie Hills Wilderness Study Area. The firm has not filed a Plan of Operations to do additional work. Some groups have proposed that the Bodie Hills receive a monument designation to protect them.

There has been a hearing on whether BLM's decision to allow livestock grazing in the Bodie Hills was arbitrary and capricious, but not a ruling.

BLM and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power are doing a test with 700 acres at Keeler Dunes to see whether straw bales and vegetation can stabilize the soil.

LADWP is applying dolomite to the Owens lakebed to stabilize it. The dolomite requires enough water to stay moist.

Lands being studied through the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan, a major component of California's renewable energy planning efforts, extend into lands managed by BLM Bishop in Inyo County.

The Casa Diablo geothermal project near Mammoth is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement that analyzes increasing production. The project is on a priority list of renewable energy projects.

Walt Pachucki said he senses a level of public frustration with the fast track renewable energy projects. He is concerned that project approval is balanced with resource protection.

Este Stifel said that renewable energy currently is a priority, but all projects go through the environmental review process. Other agencies are involved and the environmental review provides a forum to look at the impacts of the project.

Sally Miller suggested the RAC take a field trip to the Tehachapi area to see the wind farm there.

Mother Lode Field Office Report

Bill Haigh reported Harry McQuillen, Cosumnes River Preserve manager, will be in Viet Nam in July and August to advise on how to restore a river delta.

The Mother Lode Office acquired about 700 acres near Rescue and is preparing a management plan.

The Amador-Calaveras Consensus group, which includes numerous agencies and groups, has been looking at projects to improve forest health and create jobs. Last fall, BLM received a \$170,000 grant that was used to log 170 acres near Lily Gap. The project was planned according to GTR 237, a Forest Service guidebook. The Forest Service has awarded a \$750,000 grant for forest work in the region and the Sierra Business Council gave the consensus group the 2012 Sierra Vision Award.

ACTION: BLM to send GTR 237 to RAC members.

The most frequent issue raised by elected officials is fuels and fuels were the topic at a previous RAC meeting in El Dorado Hills. Jerry Martinez, Mother Lode fire management officer, got a \$1/3 million grant from the state to do fuels work with California Conservation Corps crews. He also has used AmeriCorps crews. A fuelbreak constructed last year in Tuolumne County helped stop a forest fire that was headed for Big Oak Flat.

Carl Twisselman asked about the relationship with adjacent residents at Pine Hill Preserve. Bill Haigh said the fuels work at Pine Hill Preserve was successfully carried out and BLM has a good relationship with the neighbors.

Hollister Field Office Update

Sky Murphy reported Fort Ord had been designated a national monument.

Thirteen parcels were offered for sale under the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act. Five sold, two are in process and six didn't sell.

BLM will be acquiring 928 acres on the Carmel River, which will allow public access from Monterey Bay to the Ventana Wilderness.

BLM is looking at developing an interim plan for Coast Dairies that would allow some trail use while a full plan is developed. The existing Hollister Resource Management Plan contains some language on Coast Dairies, but BLM will need to prepare an RMP amendment. The area is a potential Area of Critical Environmental Concern and may be excluded from wind energy development. The California Coastal Commission ruled three agricultural parcels can be carved out and the remainder transferred to BLM.

Under the Panoche ACEC Habitat Management Plan, BLM is looking at blocking up public lands to benefit species including the San Joaquin kit fox, the giant kangaroo rat and blunt-nosed leopard lizard. The goal is to get species removed from the T&E list or downlisted.

RAC members toured the area at the last meeting and the issue presents an opportunity for RAC involvement.

Central Valley Project Improvement Act funds are available for land acquisition.

There has been a significant amount of research in the area and researchers are looking at what is the appropriate level of grazing to reduce fuel loads and create habitat.

BLM has received applications for wind monitoring in the Tumey Hills.

Bakersfield Field Office Report

Tim Smith said Bakersfield hired three students last year in Minerals, two petroleum technicians and one GIS specialist, recruited through the College Assistance Migrant Program. This year four more students were hired, three petroleum technicians and one administrative technician.

BLM has received 274 comments on the draft Bakersfield Resource Management Plan, 167 of them on wild and scenic river designations. BLM received 15,000 comments on the Carrizo Plain National Monument draft RMP.

Based on input from EPA, BLM has added an air management plan to the proposed final RMP. An area near Tehachapi is identified as an area of ecological importance.

The San Joaquin River Gorge and North Fork Kaweah River both have been identified as suitable for W&S designation.

Washington, D.C., staff were briefed, but didn't have ~~many~~ ~~any~~ comments and Bakersfield hopes to brief the BLM Director in early to mid summer. Under that schedule, the proposed final RMP would be issued in August or September, with the Record of Decision in early 2013.

The proposed RMP would allow OHV use on the east side of the Temblors. There is already some OHV use and the plan would allow it to be managed correctly. There would be 80 miles of trails to the top of the Temblors.

BLM plans to use a planning grant to identify actions such as signage and location of staging areas.

BLM Bakersfield is working with the University of California, Merced, on plans for UC to use Atwell Island as a research station. ~~Carole Combs with the Tulare Basin Working Group is drawing up a Memorandum of Understanding with UC and BLM.~~ UC has stations at the coast and in the Sierras, but not in the San Joaquin Valley.

Steve Koretoff suggested BLM contact the Organic Farm Research Foundation to discuss plans for Atwell.

BLM Bakersfield issued more than 400 Applications for Permit to Drill for oil and gas in 2011 compared to 200 in 2010. BLM has issued more than 200 APDs for the year to date and 2,500 Sundry Notices. Lease auctions brought in \$2.8 million in 2011 and \$2.3 million for the year to date. Blair Knox said there is a lot of pressure on BLM to issue the APDs and Bakersfield has done a good job.

Sky Murphy said the Hollister Field Office hasn't processed an APD for 20 years and a 2,600-acre lease has been protested. The next proposed lease auction for Hollister is 17,000 acres

Roger Mitchell asked about fee collection at the San Joaquin River Gorge. Tim Smith said there is 30-40 percent compliance when the Gorge is not staffed and 80-90 percent when it is. Members of the public have said they like to see staff at the Gorge. There also has been positive feedback from the Back Country Horsemen and Big Sandy mountain bike race participants.

Roger Mitchell asked why BLM presented the fee proposal to a BLM/Forest Service RAC instead of the Central California RAC. Tim Smith said fee proposals are under the BLM/Forest Service Recreation RAC. Information on the fee proposal was presented to the Central California RAC, but he didn't ask for a formal recommendation.

Tim Smith, Roger Mitchell and Paul McFarland discussed how the issue was presented to the Recreation RAC.

Roger Mitchell said the 9th Circuit Court ruled the Coronado National Forest couldn't collect fees for parking. Tim Smith said he had discussed the case with solicitors and they believe the fees at the Gorge are not affected.

May 19

Attendees

RAC: Steve Koretoff, George Armstrong, Blair Knox, Walt Pachucki, Mary Gorden, Paul McFarland, Sally Miller, Reb Monaco, Carl Twisselman, Roger Mitchell.

BLM: Este Stifel, David Christy, Sky Murphy, Bill Haigh, Tim Smith, Bernadette Lovato.

Public: Benny Romero, Gary Nelson, Jim Gorden, Martha Twisselman, Barbara Christy, Jill Monaco.

Walt Pachucki asked if there were programs in the Bodie Hills area not on BLM land.

Bernadette Lovato said the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Fish and Wildlife are working with private landowners and there are conservation easements.
ACTION: Bernadette will send the RAC additional information.

Sally Miller said she sent information on the RAC meeting to conservation and historical preservation groups that are interested in working with ranchers.

Steve Koretoff said he was in Washington, D.C., for Farm Bill hearings and one issue discussed was Environmental Quality Incentives Program. There may be EQUIP funding available. Bernadette Lovato said permittees are interested in the EQUIP program.

Follow-up from Friday

ACTION: BLM will send the RAC a contact list, orientation presentation, charter and bylaws.

BLM will work on communication with the RAC and field offices will work with individual RAC members on issues. Veteran RAC members will mentor new members.

NEXT MEETING: One-day meeting in the Merced area on August 18 or 25.

Clear Creek Management Area

Sky Murphy said BLM has developed a proposed RMP and final EIS that provides for adaptive management. The document has been approved by the BLM Director. There will be a 30-day protest period after the document is released.

Este Stifel said BLM is looking for an opportunity to move forward with a collaborative process, but that is on hold until the proposed RMP is published. There might be a role for the OHV Subgroup with adaptive management. With adaptive management, changes can be made as new information comes forward.

Steve Koretoff said there is public concern that the IERF data wasn't considered in the proposed RMP. Este Stifel said the proposed RMP will explain how the IERF data was considered.

Temblors

Tim Smith said he would like a subgroup devoted to OHV use in the Temblors. A stakeholder process will start early next year.

Reb Monaco moved and Paul McFarland seconded a motion to form the subgroup.

ACTION: The RAC voted to approve a new subgroup with Mary Gorden, Carl Twisselman and Blair Knox as members to work with BLM Bakersfield on the Temblors. Blair Knox is the chairman.

Public Comment

Gary Nelson said Cougar Gold, the firm that did exploration in the Bodie Hills, won't discuss its plans unless the Bodie WSA is released. The opinion around Mono County is against releasing the WSA and both Congressman Buck McKeon and Senator Harry Reid oppose the release.

There is concern that a Bodie Hills upland vegetation restoration project is not based on adequate scientific evidence. Connie Millar, a Forest Service researcher, should do a peer review of the scientific basis for the project.

BLM should prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and delay the project until the Bishop Resource Management Plan is revised. In the meantime, BLM should focus on specific sites near populated areas and Bodie State Park.

A number of pinion removal projects are being done around the West as Wildland Urban Interface projects. In Lincoln County, Nevada, Pinion is chipped and exported to China for power generation. In other areas, pinion is cut and burned. Gary Nelson asked if that is a good idea based on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

Roger Mitchell asked if Gary Nelson favors retaining Wilderness Study Area status for the Bodie Hills. Gary Nelson said the previous review was done for the 1990 RMP and conditions have changed since then. Bridgeport residents see more economic potential from tourism in the Bodie Hills rather than mining. He supports a wilderness designation.

Carl Twisselman asked if a NEPA document has been prepared for a gold mine. Bernadette Lovato said the mining company hasn't applied for a permit that would trigger NEPA.

Bernadette Lovato said information on the Bodie Hills vegetation project was provided to the public in 2005. Connie Millar's studies find that pinion areas expand and contract based on climactic conditions.

Sally Miller said the Wilderness Society is not pursuing a wilderness designation for the Bodie Hills at this time, but is working with the community on a designation that would protect the area from mining and replace the WSA designation.

The Wilderness Society is focused on the larger issue of how to protect sage grouse habitat from oil and gas drilling.

Steve Koretoff suggested those interested in the Bodie Hills look to the Alabama Hills group as a model.

Benny Romero said there should be uses other than mining at the Bodie Hills. He does not support a wilderness designation because it would eliminate motorized access.

Debra Lury said the Bodie Hills has a large intact ecosystem and she would hate to see large areas mowed or burned. If large areas are burned, mowed or masticated, they won't be attractive to tourists. Tourism should be the focus for the Bodie Hills rather than mining.

Sam Davidson from Trout Unlimited said areas in the valley around Bridgeport are have habitat conservation in cooperation with the private sector. The Bodie Hills should follow that model. The Bodie Hills have good mule deer and sage grouse habitat and sport hunting should be preserved.

Paul McFarland said he sees decreasing federal capacity to manage areas. The Alabama Hills group has changed the way the Lone Pine community views the Alabamas and government. The local community needs to decide what it wants for the Bodie Hills.